

## **Statement by Ambassador Tony Hall**

I am very pleased to be a part of this initiative headed by my friend, Frank Wolf, and supported by other members of the Congress and Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

As His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan so clearly spelled out two weeks ago to the Congress, the unresolved conflict between Israel and Palestine has resulted in tremendous pain in Israel, the Palestinian territories and other nations in the Middle East. This problem has fueled additional fires outside of the region that have brought fear, destruction and extremism to many countries and people, including our own. The situation is at such a point that it is no longer only an isolated regional conflict in which we can choose to be involved, it is a problem that directly affects the security of the United States.

I have traveled a number of times to the Middle East, starting in 1979, and most recently having returned from there this past week. We did a lot of listening; and what I have seen and heard leads me to believe that there has not been a more urgent time for peace. There are a lot of people already working on multiple fronts in waging peace, and my role in the coming months will be to support them by fostering additional relationships, understanding, and cooperation among the various communities in the Holy Land.

I want to clarify that my mission is not to distract from the political side of the peace process, but to lay additional groundwork for an eventual political outcome. However, one cannot speak about peace on the political level without taking into account the religious roots of the people involved – especially in the Holy Land.

Our service is to support and encourage the people of faith who bear influence in the region. We are connecting with people of faith because as leaders of these communities they can either encourage the way of compassion, sacrifice and grace in this process – which is necessary to support a political outcome, or they can incite their people in the hopeless path of the status quo. We want to help the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities who recognize and labor for peace by practicing the commandment to “Love your neighbor.”

The Abrahamic faiths have been in conflict for so long, that most of us have forgotten that at the core of each of them lies that universal commandment: “Love your neighbor.” By going back to this fundamental starting point ourselves, and encouraging our friends in the region to do likewise, we believe that we can construct some good will that we hope may help support a political settlement.

We are not under any illusion that we alone can solve the conflict. My good friend Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and other community, political, business and religious leaders are coming together to share in the work of preparing the way for peace in the Holy Land. Together we hope that our combined efforts can in some small way, assist in paving the way for a just and lasting peace.

It's worth a try.